

Recreational Liability Hearing Testimony, 4/4/2011, 10am, Room 2C
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Good morning.

I would like to take a few moments to tell you about the experiences that people from Connecticut have while on property that would pertain to this legislative agenda.

My own background is as a volunteer firefighter, EMT and Trail Manager for one of Connecticut's blue blazed trails. From time to time I have assisted with locating lost hikers in Connecticut or responding to an occasional outdoor injury. These happen. Not often but they do. In each of the events that I have participated in, not one of those involved has attributed any blame to anyone but themselves. The vast majority of the time my outdoor responsibilities have been keeping trails clear of fallen branches and such and providing hikers with information about particular views, trail history or birds, plants and animals in the area.

As more and more electronic alternatives press for the attention of our children it becomes more important to make them aware of the entertainment and enjoyment received by those who would tarry along a trail next to a river or through the woods. Those who would pause to examine a plant as it slowly uncurls from fiddlehead to fern. To feel the texture of a tree's bark. To compare the scents of different wildflowers. To observe a Chickadee flit branch to branch. To be fortunate enough to see the majestic sight of a Bald Eagle. To invent games of their own and exercise their imagination as well as their bodies.

It used to be that our backyards were nature preserves. Building lots and yards were larger then. Nowadays children simply don't have a readily available sampling of nature within their grasp. Today most families have to travel to find that. To restrict that further by closing access would in many cases completely eliminate that exposure that will shape our children's views as they become adults. How can they be expected to become stewards of these resources if they have such limited experience to draw from? How will the needs of such sanctuaries ever become important to them if they themselves are not brought up with access to such places?

So the cost of removing this access is indeed high. How do we avoid that? We have to ensure that we provide appropriate legal protection for the owners of these areas so that they are not afraid of the consequences of allowing people onto them. Yes, nature is beautiful. But nature itself cares not for whomever would trip over a tree root or fall into a stream. Living and dying are both aspects of all natural things. Injuries and healing are part of that too. We all need to accept that nature is, well, nature. That as custodians we will minimize risks as well as can be expected but risks can never be eliminated. There will be skinned knees. There will be sprained ankles and broken bones. Yes, there will even be worse. We, as those who would partake of the offerings of nature's bounty, have to accept those conditions. We cannot place blame on those municipalities or organizations who would allow us to hike, bike, jog or otherwise wander through their properties. So please consider providing that protection. Only then can we ensure that the bounty of nature's beauty will remain available to all who would wish to enjoy it.

Thank you for your time.
